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UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
EXTENSION BULLETIN



HOW FARM TENANTS LIVE

J. A. DICKEY and E. C. BRANSON

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA PRESS
CHAPEL HILL, N. C.

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
EXTENSION BULLETIN

HOW FARM TENANTS LIVE

By J. A. DICKEY and E. C. BRANSON



A SOCIAL-ECONOMIC SURVEY IN
CHATHAM COUNTY, N. C.

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA PRESS
CHAPEL HILL, N. C.

WHO WILL SOLVE THIS PROBLEM?

Our tenant farmers—courageous, honest, patient and long-suffering—when shall they see light? When shall their burdens be lifted? In the spring time they go forth, and with our brothers in black set their hands to the plow. They bend their backs to the burden, and when the frost falls they have added \$1,000,000,000 to the wealth of the world. But small, indeed, is their share and meager their recompense. Every two years, according to the government census, they move from one place to another.

They build no homes, they live in rude huts, no flowers about their dwellings, no trees to shade them from the sun, consumed by the summer's heat and chilled by the winter's cold, no lawns about their houses, no garden fences; and with the accursed cotton plant crowding the very threshold of their rude dwellings and thrusting its limbs into their very windows, their lot is indeed pitiable.

Their sons and daughters come to manhood and womanhood, desert the farms and are lost in some distant community. Finally, when their pilgrimage is over, they are laid to rest in the rude churchyards of the country, others take their places and continue the fight. They have established no permanent homes, their kith and kin are scattered far and wide, and the places that knew them once know them no more forever.

I have no word of criticism for men like these. I know them, I have lived among them. I sprang from them. Who will lead these men out of the wilderness of their troubles? Men whom they elevate to high offices in the state and nation are ever ready to teach them politics, but they are not prepared to help them solve their problems of life. A fearful responsibility rests at this time upon men in authority and men in high offices. Will they heed it?—Joseph T. Holleman.

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OUR LANDLESS MULTIUDES

North Carolina has twenty-two million idle wilderness acres, a hundred thousand vacant town and city lots, and a million three hundred eighty thousand landless, homeless people, town and country. Almost exactly one-third of our white farmers and two-thirds of our negro farmers own no land. The people who live in rented dwellings in our towns and cities are from two-thirds to three-fourths of the various municipal populations.

These are the people in North Carolina who own not an inch of the soil they cultivate nor a single shingle in the roofs over their heads. They are fifty-two per cent or more than half the entire population of the state.

Enduring social structures cannot be built on land-ownership by the few and land-orphanage for the many. Civilization is rooted and grounded in the home-owning, home-loving, home-defending instincts.—E. C. Branson.

INTRODUCTION

1. The schedule of the North Carolina Club at the University of North Carolina in 1921-22 covered the various phases of Home and Farm Ownership—Town and Country, and week by week the University News Letter carried to the press and the people of the state brief summaries of the Club reports, discussions and conclusions. The Club Year-Book will soon be going into the mails, and in twenty-two chapters will give to the public these studies in full detail.

2. In December 1921 the State Board of Agriculture appointed a State Farm Tenancy Commission consisting of B. F. Brown, Chief of the State Marketing Bureau, Chairman; Clarence Poe, member of the State Board, and editor of the *Progressive Farmer*; C. C. Taylor of the State College of Agriculture and Engineering; W. C. Jackson of the State College for Women; and E. C. Branson of the State University. The three state institutions named were asked to collaborate with the State and the Federal Department of Agriculture and to conduct field studies of farm tenancy in three typical farm territories. These surveys were made in the summer months of 1922, in compact areas of (1) Edgecombe, a cotton county in the East, (2) Chatham, a diversified farm county in the mid-state, on the edge of the cotton-tobacco belt, and (3) Madison, a mountain county that for fifty years has been developing the evils of tenancy farming in a territory almost exclusively white in population. The surveys were under the general direction of Dr. C. C. Taylor, who is now summarizing the results for the State Tenancy Commission, which in turn will report its findings and conclusions to the State Legislature through the State Board of Agriculture.

3. The particular responsibility of the State University in these surveys was Chatham county which lies within easy distance of the campus. The University surveyor was J. A. Dickey of Alamance county which adjoins Chatham. Mr. Dickey is an A. B. graduate of Elon College, an A.M. graduate of the University, and during his university year an active member of the North Carolina Club. Both the survey purposes and the farm folk surveyed were familiar to Mr. Dickey. He was born and reared on an Alamance county farm. All his life he has lived among the farm people in the hill country on the edge of the fall line of the state. His courses in rural social-economics at the University were directly aimed at his summer survey task, and his field work was done with rare insight, sympathetic understanding, and unfailing tact. Mr. Dickey is now a research fellow of the Cornell College of Agriculture, at Ithaca, N. Y.

4. In keeping with formal resolutions of the Tenancy Commission before the survey began, the North Carolina Club at the University has used the data assembled in Chatham county by Mr. Dickey for a Year-Book chapter on The Social Status of Our Farm Tenants. It is the phase of farm tenancy that the Club has been most interested in. We have therefore considered the economic data in brief and only as related in the

largest way to the social estate of John Smith—Tenant. The economic summaries and significances of the surveys in the three counties will be found in detail in the forthcoming report of Dr. Taylor covering all the counties studied and all phases of the study.

5. The conclusions and recommendations of this particular chapter concern Chatham county tenancy in Baldwin and Williams townships, and convey to the public the best thinking of the North Carolina Club. Which means that we are purposing to relieve our collaborators of responsibility for the utterances herein—and possibly, of embarrassment.—E. C. BRANSON, *Chairman of the Steering Committee, North Carolina Club.*

HOW OUR FARM TENANTS LIVE

I

The Money They Live On

What about marrying on \$20 a month—really on \$6.00 a month in money, the balance of your cash income being held back till the end of the year? On a money income of that sort, do you think you'd have the nerve to set about establishing a home, sheltering, feeding, clothing, and safe-guarding a family in sickness and in health, and giving the children a decent chance at life?

I shoved these questions at a young college graduate on the train the other day—a cotton buyer in a flourishing cotton-belt city.

He looked at me in amazement. Kidding me? said he. Looks like it. I'm getting \$200 a month, and I can't get married. I'd be a fool to marry on any such income. It couldn't be done in my town.

But, said I, this is exactly what fifty-one farmers have had the nerve to do in one small corner of a mid-state county in North Carolina. Thirty-eight of them are tenants, who handled in 1921 a household average of \$250.64 in cash in the run of the year or just a little more than \$20 a month. Thirteen are croppers with a household average of \$153.27 in cash or a little less than \$13 a month. And they are not negro farmers. They are white farmers—tenants to be sure, but native born whites of your race and mine.

How in the name of the Holy-Pink-Toed Prophet do they do it? he said. By which epithet, I gathered that he had been chumming with Cappy Ricks o' nights around the office stove.

Well, said I, they have no house rent to pay—that's everywhere free in this blessed land of cottontots; and no coal bills, for fire-wood is still abundant and free on every farm in North Carolina. Their grocery bills are small, because the farm itself furnishes from three-fourths to four-fifths of the food they eat—vegetables, milk and butter, poultry and eggs, and a little home-raised pork. And then they have various fruits and game in season, by grace of their landowning neighbors or the free gift of the fields. The landlords want their share of the corn and the cash-crop money, but everything else the tenants produce is freely their own. They have plenty to eat and wear, sheer existence considered. It is impossible to starve or freeze in the country regions of North Carolina. God Almighty made the state to be a paradise for poor folks.

He came back at me promptly. But, said he, they need money for shoes and head-wear; they need money for doctors, midwives and dentists, for prescriptions and patent medicines at the drug store, for the contribution box at the church on Sundays, for taxes and insurance, for gas and oil, for chewing tobacco and snuff and a cigar once in a while, for gun shells and fishing tackle, for school books, newspapers and victrolas, for

movies, ice-cream cones and bottled drinks, for fairs, circuses, and street carnivals in the occasional trips to town.

Sure, I said. And after paying the family bill for bread, bonnets and paragoric, how much do you think they have left for social servants like teachers, preachers, and doctors, for social institutions like churches, schools, and colleges, for state and county treasuries, and for petty self-indulgences?

They couldn't have much ready money left over for any such purposes as these, said he. After paying my room rent, cafeteria charges, haberdashery bills, bootblack and barber fees, pressing-club dues, newspaper and magazine subscriptions, and various inescapable incidental expenses, I had only \$150 left over last year, and the doctors got every cent of that before I had any chance to spend it on a good time Christmas. I didn't wind up the year in debt, but I was barely on the safe side of the deadline. I think I did pretty well, better in fact than most of the fellows. But as for getting married on \$200 a month—nix! I'd be an idiot to do it.

But, I said, on a money average of \$20 a month these fifty-one white tenant farmers not only kept themselves and their families alive, but twenty-five of them were out of debt at the end of the year. And more, they have actually accumulated \$23,277 in personal property—in work-stock, farm implements, household goods and utensils, automobiles, guns, and dogs; and their debts all told were only \$4,100. Debts counted out, they are nearly \$20,000 ahead of the game.

Well, all I've got to say, he replied, is that they are some financiers! They've got more sense than I've got. If you are giving me straight dope, don't ever again let anybody talk to you about stupid, lazy tenant farmers.

But say, said he, how do these people live? How do they keep soul and body together on an average of thirteen to twenty dollars a month in money? What are their standards of living? What are their notions of comfort and culture? They are not starved nor even half-starved in body, you say, but they must be wholly starved in mind—halt and maimed and blind in spirit! What can they look forward to? Can they ever hope to be anything but underling farmers, disadvantaged and under-privileged, they and their children and their children's children to the remotest generation?

All of which are tremendously important questions. They concern 63,487 white farm tenants in North Carolina. With their families they number 317,500 souls, or nearly one-fifth of the entire white population of the state. Who are these people? Why are they farm tenants instead of farm owners? On what level do they live? What are their hopes and fears? What chance have they to rise out of farm tenancy into farm ownership?

A Close-up Study

John Smith—Tenant, is a piteous figure, as MacNeill's pen gives him to us in the *News and Observer*. But John Smith, the Wayne county tenant who took the first prize for diversified farming, at the state fair last year, is quite another story. We know much about this or that tenant farmer, but in the South we know almost nothing about our white tenant farmers as a class. And landlords know much about the tenant farmer as an economic factor in the business of farming, but they know very little about him as a social and civic asset or liability in community life and commonwealth development. In cold figures we know nearly all there is to know about farm tenants the country over—the number, the ratios, the types, and the increases or decreases in each state since 1880; and, in recent years in certain closely surveyed areas in the South and Middle West, cold figures have told us much about their farm practices, their labor incomes, and the havoc they work upon soils and farm buildings. But we know much less, in most states nearly nothing, about the tenant as a human being—his home life, his church and school interests, his habits and hopes, and the part he has played in lifting or lowering the level of civilization in his home community. We have reckoned him in dollars and cents; we have not yet appraised him as a home-maker or as a community builder or destroyer in free American democracies. We have known very little about him as a citizen and we have cared less—or so until very recently in this and other states.

What we need is a close-up study of the 317,000 souls in the families of the white tenants of North Carolina. And it must be a keenly sympathetic study or we shall fail to understand and interpret aright the facts we find.

The Tenancy Area Surveyed

In order to supply this need, at least in part, Mr. J. A. Dickey, an A.M. graduate of the State University, spent the three summer months of 1922 in 329 farm homes of Baldwin and Williams townships in the northeast corner of Chatham county. They were the homes of practically all the farmers of this small area—the homes of owners and tenants, white and black.

Chatham is a mid-state county situated along the Fall Line, on the eastern edge of the Piedmont region of the state. The cotton and tobacco counties of the Coastal Plain adjoin it on the east and south, and on the north and west lie the grain, hay, and forage counties of the state. It is a land of rolling hills, abundant water courses, and rich bottom soils—a natural livestock region. The fertility of the soil is attested by the fact that in the olden days it was the seat of a slave-holding aristocracy. Neither slavery nor tenancy ever flourished in poor soils anywhere in the South. There were 729 slave-holding families in Chatham in 1860. Only six counties of the state had more slave-holders and only sixteen contained more slaves. Nevertheless there were in Chatham nearly 1800 white families who owned no slaves. They outnumbered the slave-owning

families more than two to one.* Many of these non-slave-holding families in Chatham owned small farms on the poorer soils of the ridges; some were artisans—carpenters, blacksmiths, shoemakers, tailors and the like; some were farm laborers getting \$75 a year and board—rarely ever more; some were renters and others were overseers on the slave plantations; most of them were illiterate—the exceptions were few, and all alike belonged to a lower social estate. The negroes called them “pore white trash.” Today the descendants of these 1800 families are almost entirely the farm owners of the county. Their trend has been steadily upward these last sixty years. The aristocracy of the old slave plantation died out or moved away long years ago. Hardly a vestige of the old social order remains. The history of Chatham since the war, like that of many another remote slave county, is the story of a middle class rising slowly and clumsily into democratic self-rule.

The county was long without railroads. Even now the middle and upper half of Chatham lacks railroad facilities; and only within the last eighteen months are the public roads of the county beginning to attain to the standards of modern life. In the remoter corners of Chatham, as in Williams and Baldwin townships, country schools are poorly housed and poorly supported. Here the little one-teacher school is still the rule. Local school taxes for consolidated schools and transportation trucks are only just now being considered. Aside from Bynum, a little cotton mill village of forty-odd dwellings in the southeast corner of Baldwin township, there are no towns or villages in this area. The farmers are settled in solitary dwellings (only three to the square mile) as almost everywhere else in the rural South. The thirteen roadside stores, the ten schools, and the twelve churches are the centers of country neighborhood life for whites and blacks alike.

Without convenient market facilities, the farms have naturally been devoted in the main to bread-and-meat production for home consumption. Cotton and tobacco are the small money crops. Corn, wheat, oats, potatoes, milk and butter, poultry and pork are the abundant staples of existence. The farm population is upstanding and sturdy, robust and vigorous. The signs of degeneracy are rare, and I say this having in mind the natives left in the farm regions of the North and East.

But the money the farmers handle from year to year is too little to encourage them to place their schools and local public roads on a basis of liberal tax support. The county is an area designed by nature for diversified farming and well balanced farm systems, but the farmers of Chatham must devote themselves to money crops in larger measures. This fundamental fact cannot be too greatly emphasized in this report. It is the outstanding economic necessity revealed in this study. No farm system can be a satisfactory basis for progressive civilization unless it have

* The ratio of non-slave-holding to slave-holding families was roughly three to one in North Carolina as a whole, and in the twelve slave-holding states of the South. Of the 126,000 white families in North Carolina in 1860 only 35,000 held slaves; and of the 1,273,000 white families in the South only 355,000 families were slave-holders. Data abstracted from the 1860 census.

money products in abundant measure. The farmers must have markets for their money crops and ready money in circulation far beyond anything Mr. Dickey found in the northeast corner of Chatham. Without a larger volume of ready money for daily needs, the landowners, tenants, and croppers of the two townships surveyed have a poor chance to keep step with the rest of North Carolina.

Living on 23 Cents a Day Per Person

The survey figures are startling. The total gross money income of the 329 farmers of Williams and Baldwin townships in Chatham county in 1921 was only \$144,041, and of this grand total \$27,162 was produced by work on public roads, bridges and buildings—much of it by work on the buildings under erection on the campus of the State University, by casual labor at odd jobs in the nearby towns, by state and federal pensions, allotments and the like.

In detail the gross money income figures are as follows:

	Sale of Farm Products	Other Cash Income	Total Money Income	Average Per Family
ALL FARMS				
135 white owners.....	\$ 72,218	\$12,325	\$ 84,553	\$626.24
41 negro owners.....	18,706	3,002	21,708	529.46
102 negro tenants	17,867	8,396	26,263	257.49
51 white tenants.....	8,077	3,439	11,517	225.80
329 farmers	\$116,868	\$27,162	\$144,041	\$437.81

The average per person in these 329 farm families was only 23 cents a day! The cash in circulation in the homes of the fifty-one white tenants was only twelve cents a day per person, only fourteen cents a day per person in the homes of the negro tenants, only thirty-two cents a day per person in negro farm-owner homes, and only thirty-four cents a day per person in white farm-owner homes!

Here certainly is life reduced to its very lowest terms in money. How could anybody, black or white, live on less money and live at all? How can white tenants on a daily cash income of twelve cents a day per person ever buy and pay for farms of their own? They do it—fifty-seven of the white farm-owners of this particular territory have done it during the last twenty years. And on fourteen cents a day per person, thirty-four negro farm renters and croppers have risen into farm ownership during the same period. The average cash income of tenants in this area has probably been less than fifteen cents a day per person throughout this entire period. They do it, but how they do it passes understanding. And moreover they have done it by self-effort alone. Not one of these ninety-one farm owners, of either race, received his land by inheritance, gift, or marriage.

Can this record be beat in any other state of the Union? This is what I have in mind when I say that God Almighty made North Carolina to be a paradise for poor folks—that is to say, for the average poor man content with merely keeping soul and body together in the country regions.

But for the poor man who aspires to own his own farm the state is a purgatory. If the farm is ever paid for, it must be paid for in pinching self-denial, in the field work of his wife and children, and in the lack of school advantages, newspapers, magazines, and noble books. How could it be otherwise on an average money income of fifteen cents a day per person?

The figures of average daily cash income on the farms of these two townships in Chatham county are a cue to the cash farm incomes of North Carolina in general. The averages are larger in the all-cash-crop counties of the cotton and tobacco belt proper, at least in exceptional years, but all in all our farmers everywhere handle too little money in the run of the year; and their surpluses even in the best years are too small to serve as any safe basis on which to build a commonwealth. Here is the reason why the accumulated personal property of white tenants averages only \$526 per family, only \$426 per white cropper family, only \$409 per black renter family, and only \$123 per black cropper family!

The same facts explain why the accumulated wealth in farm properties—farm land, buildings, livestock and implements alone—was only \$567 per country inhabitant in Chatham county as a whole in 1920; and only \$684 the state over.

These are pitiful figures when contrasted with \$1,836, the average wealth per farm dweller in the United States as a whole, with \$7,260 in South Dakota, and with \$8,113 in Iowa.

There is too little ready cash in circulation in the country regions of North Carolina and too little accumulated wealth. Until both are multiplied many times over, the twelve hundred thousand farm people of North Carolina are a mired wheel in our civilization.

The state as a whole is rich, but our farmers are poor—in Chatham and in every other county of North Carolina.

The farm homes studied by Mr. Dickey were the homes of white farm owners, negro farm owners, negro renters and croppers, and white renters and croppers. In the main, this chapter is concerned with the 51 white renters and croppers. Not that we lack interest in the negro tenants and croppers, but because these negro farmers are working out their own salvation in most amazing fashion—in Chatham just as everywhere else in the cotton-belt South, at least in every area where the blacks are thinly scattered among white majorities.

Thus Mr. Dickey's studies concern a small section of the large problem of white farm tenancy in North Carolina and the South.

Economic Classes and Levels

1. *The Farm Owners.* The land of these two Chatham county townships is owned by 176 landlords—135 white and 41 black. Their accumulated wealth in 1921—in farm lands, buildings, livestock, implements and machinery, household goods and utensils and other personal properties—was \$624,642 for the whites and \$93,856 for the blacks. Which is an

average of \$4,627 per white farm owner, and \$2,407 per black farm owner. Thirteen of them run small roadside stores. All but sixty-one are active farmers, living on and cultivating a portion of their lands and letting out the rest to renters and croppers. Twenty are absentee-landlords living in other counties—mainly in Chapel Hill. Much or most of the land of the farm owners is lying idle, because farm labor has drifted into the cotton mills at Carrboro, Bynum and elsewhere, or is getting better wages at public work on roads, bridges and buildings, or in hauling, jitney driving, and odd jobs of various sorts in nearby towns. Farming in these two townships is at a low ebb, for lack of renters, croppers and wage hands.

2. *The Tenants.* The tenants number 153—white 51 and black 102. The ratio of tenants to all farmers is therefore 46.5 percent or nearly half, against 35.8 percent in the county-at-large, and 43.5 percent in the state-at-large. The 51 white tenants have accumulated personal property amounting to \$23,277 which is an average of only \$456 per family. The 102 black tenants hold property amounting to \$31,430, an average of \$308 per family. The families of the black and white tenants, as you see, are not very far apart in worldly goods.

The tenants of both races fall into two classes, namely renters and croppers. The white renters are 38 and the white croppers are 13. The black renters are 66 and the black croppers are 36.

All the tenants are farming under one-year contracts, and all the contracts are informal and unwritten. Tenant leases in writing are nowhere common in the South.

(1) *The Renters.* A renter is a tenant who owns his own workstock and farm implements—enough to ‘run himself,’ as the phrase goes. As a rule he pays three-fourths of the fertilizer bill and gets two-thirds of the corn and three-fourths of the cash crop money. All of everything else the renter produces, except the cotton seed, is his. The details and ratios vary a little here and there according to what the renter furnishes and also according to the fertility of the farm. The renters are the upper-crust of the tenants, the top of the pot, as they say in our farm regions. They rank next to the landlords in the ownership of property—mainly personal property. They own something more than their household goods. In a small way they own the tools of their trade, and enjoy a fairly large measure of independent self-direction. I may add that tenant and renter are interchangeable terms in Chatham and generally throughout the South.

(2) *The Croppers.* A cropper is a tenant who is staked by the landlord—is ‘run by the landlord,’ in the common phrase of our country regions. He owns little or nothing but the simple things in and around his cabin. Usually he owns no workstock and no farm implements, or not enough to count in the year’s bargain with the landlord. Everything is furnished by the landlord—land, dwelling, firewood, workstock, implements, and from time to time small advances of money and pantry supplies to help him produce the crops. He pays half the fertilizer bill and gets half the corn and the cash crop money. Everything else except the cotton seed is his. Against the cropper’s half of the crop money, the landlord charges

the cropper's debts for advances and the cropper's share of the fertilizer bills. Croppers are 'havers' (halfers) as the phrase goes, with little or nothing to invest in farming except the bare labor of themselves and their families. They are so called because they get not two-thirds or three-fourths of the corn and the cash crop money, as in case of the renters, but only half. As in case of the renter, the cropper's rent details vary somewhat on different farms.

Croppers are distinctly the under-crust of the farmers in the South—the bottom-rail, the under-dog, in country phrase. They are a type of farm population that is almost unknown in the North and West, but they have been a most significant fact in Southern agriculture for more than a half century. Nevertheless the term did not get into the census dictionary until 1920—a strange oversight, considering the fact that 225,000 or a full fourth of all the white tenants in the thirteen cotton and tobacco states of the South are croppers. In North Carolina the ratio is one-fourth, and in Chatham it is one-fourth, and in Baldwin and Williams townships it is one-fourth. One-fourth looks like a fatal ratio for the submerged white croppers of the South. The croppers in particular are The Forgotten Men that Walter H. Page wrote about—The Men Whom God Forgot, in the phrase of Robert W. Service.

Accumulated Property and Gross Money Incomes

How little renters and croppers own and how little money they handle during the year appears in the following table, covering the year 1921 in Baldwin and Williams townships of Chatham county.

ECONOMIC CLASSES	Property Owned	Owned Per Family	Total Cash Income	Cash Per Family
135 white owners.....	\$624,642	\$4,627	\$ 84,553	\$626
41 black owners.....	93,856	2,407	21,708	597
38 white renters.....	19,999	526	9,525	251
13 white croppers.....	3,279	426	1,993	153
66 black renters.....	27,016	409	19,053	289
36 black croppers.....	4,113	123	2,777	197
 329 farmers	\$772,905	\$2,349	\$139,609	\$424

In order to render more vivid the money-bare condition of the farmers in Williams and Baldwin townships in Chatham, we are tabulating the money handled in their homes per person per day in 1921. Throughout this study we are speaking of the gross money income of these farmers. And bear in mind (1) that 69 percent of this income was derived from farming, most of which came in lump sums in the fall when their cotton and tobacco were sold, and (2) that 31 percent of it was produced by other interests and activities more or less casual. This casual income was the ready money they handled from day to day. The bulk of their cash was not in hand till the market season at the end of the year.

The average daily cash income of these 329 farmers in 1921 was as follows:

ECONOMIC CLASSES	Family Cash Per Year	Daily Cash Per Person
135 white owners.....	\$626	34 cents
41 black owners.....	597	32 "
38 white renters.....	251	14 "
13 white croppers.....	153	8 "
66 black renters.....	289	16 "
36 black croppers.....	197	10 "

If these were not actual figures reported in person by the farmers themselves, they would be absolutely unbelievable. How can farm tenants live and keep their families alive on average actual cash incomes ranging from eight to sixteen cents a day per family member? How can they afford to wait ten or twelve months for the balance of their money? The answer is, They couldn't but for (1) the meagre credit of the supply stores, and (2) advances of their landlords—small sums of money and pantry supplies from time to time. And when their crop money comes in later, their debts consume it almost to the last cent.

Such is the economic status of 153 renters and croppers, black and white, or nearly half of all the farmers in this little area of the cotton-tobacco belt in the South—the status of 51 or more than a fourth of all the white farmers, the status of 102 or nearly three-fourths of all the negro farmers, in Williams and Baldwin townships in Chatham county, North Carolina.

As the farm tenants are in this little corner of Chatham, so they are in general throughout the state and every other state in the South.

The economic levels of the 329 farm homes covered by this particular field-study are indicated by the following charts exhibiting (1) the average of property owned per family, and (2) the average money handled per day per person in the household.

The concentration of farm property in the hands of the landowners, and the amazingly low levels of farm tenants in property ownership appear at a glance. In detail the facts are as follows: (1) a little more than half of all the farmers, both races counted into the total, are landowners, but they own more than nine-tenths of all the property. (2) The black farm owners are a little more than a fourth of all the negro farmers, but they own three-fourths of all the negro property. (3) The white farm owners are nearly three-fourths of all the white farmers, but they own ninety-seven percent of all the white property.

Farm areas in general are distinctly characterized by the equable distribution of property, but not so in Southern farm tenancy areas. The disparity in property ownership between farm owners and farm tenants is startling. Such farm wealth as we have in the South is in the hands of the farm owners. It is so in the case of both races. What the tenants own—renters or croppers—is nearly nothing. The drawl of a white cropper exhibits it with photographic accuracy; "Ain't no trouble fer me

Property Levels Per Family

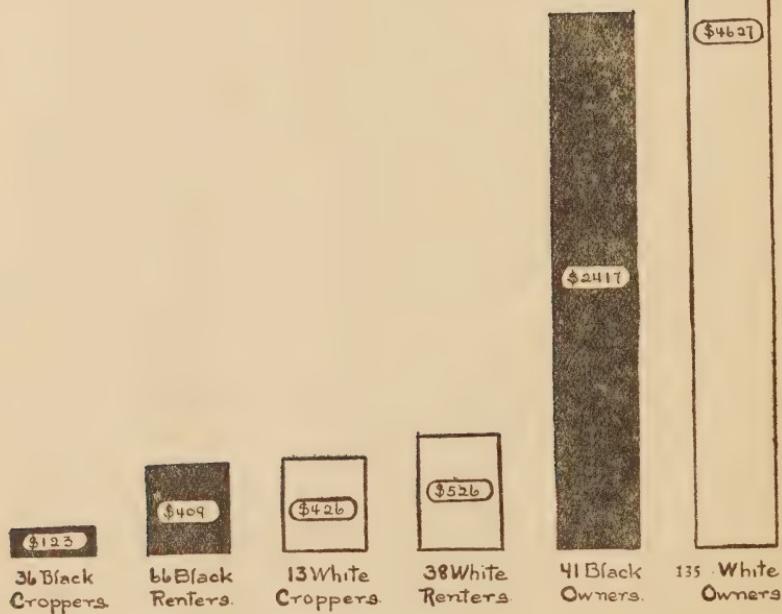
329 Farms.

Baldwin + Williams.

Townships

Chatham County, N.C.

1921.



to move. I ain't got nothing much but er soap gourd and er string er red-peppers. All I got to do is ter call up Tige, spit in the fire place, and start down ther road."

But the essential disparity lies in the ownership of land or the lack of such ownership. The tenants as a class own no land. They own a little

personal property, but no land. The ownership of land is just as significant today as it was ten centuries ago when the Saxons coined the phrases: "The land is the man; no land, no man; who owns the land owns the man; who owns the land rules the realm."

Landownership and liberty go hand in hand in every land under Heaven under any form of government. Freedom—economic, social and political—lies essentially in the ownership of farms in the countryside, and homes in the towns and cities. Landless farm tenants and homeless city dwellers are a rapidly increasing body of people everywhere in America. Already they are a majority in twenty-one states of the Union—in the Great Industrial area north of the Ohio and east of the Mississippi, they are now an overwhelming majority. And some day these people must be reckoned with en masse. Macaulay's prophecy set 1937 as the fateful year of reckoning between the Haves and the Have-nots in America. The beginnings of this time, said Lord Bryce in 1910, lie not more than twenty years ahead. America in her swift onward progress—he goes on to say—sees, looming on the horizon and now no longer distant, a line of mists and shadows wherein dangers may lie concealed, whose form and magnitude she can scarcely yet conjecture.—*The American Commonwealth*, volume II, pp 912-13, 1910 edition. The common condition of landlessness will at last breed a common like-mindedness. Signs of it appear with increasing frequency of late—as for instance in Texas in the last state election—and they are disquieting. Can a civilization forever endure on the basis of political freedom and economic serfdom? At bottom this is the issue that is being fought out in England at this very minute—with ballots, in the English way. Soon or late this is the fundamental issue that America faces, and let us hope that it can be faced in the English and not in the Russian way.

Cash Income Levels

The landowning farmers and the landless tenants, in the Chatham area surveyed, are far apart in the possession of property. There is less distance between them in the annual average cash handled per household. David R. Coker of Hartsville, S. C., reckoned the average cash incomes on the cotton farms of the South in 1921 at \$600.*

In our survey, the average cash income of 135 white farm owners was \$626 or a little above Mr. Coker's estimate; it was \$597 or a trifle below for the 41 black farm owners. As for the tenants, it ranged from \$153 for the white croppers to \$289 for the black renters. The average gross cash income for the 329 farmers, owners and tenants, black and white, was only \$424 in 1921 or nearly a full third less than Mr. Coker's estimate.

These annual cash incomes are in striking contrast with \$881.90 the average necessary money income for a family of three, and with \$1,501.45 the average for a family of six in the anthracite coal region of Pennsylvania, as reported by the National Industrial Conference Board, in February 1922.

* Address before the Cosmos Club, Columbia, S. C., October 22, 1922.

The black farm owners and the white farm owners were nearly on a level in annual cash incomes per family; and the negro renters were well above the white renters. The black croppers occupy the next level and the white croppers foot the column. The croppers, white and black, handle less than \$200 in cash in the run of the year.

The cash incomes of the white farm owners are reduced to a small measure by the idle unproductive land they own. Their main wealth is in land. They are land-poor today, as our landowners were in the days immediately following the war of 1860-65. Nevertheless they hold these profitless lands with grim determination. No other business men on earth would hold on to dead capital in such large measure.

The inadequacy of these cash incomes is better realized when they are reduced to the daily cash per household member.

The table is as follows:

CASH INCOME CLASSES	DAILY CASH PER PERSON
1. White farm owners.....	.34 cents
2. Black farm owners.....	.32 "
3. Black renters.....	.16 "
4. White renters.....	.14 "
5. Black croppers.....	.10 "
6. White croppers.....	.08 "

The advantage of the landless negro farmer over the landless white farmer is plainer than print.

But aside from the question of class levels, the bare facts of daily money income per household member are arresting—or they ought to be.

Everybody knows about the picayune daily wage of pauper labor in the far East. We have the same thing in the cotton-belt of the South. We have had vague notions about this thing, but here are the facts or a small cross section of the facts. Half of all our Southern farmers, counting blacks and whites together, are tenants, and a full third of these tenants are croppers. For long years they have been producing cotton on a pauper level at a pauper daily wage in money.

Will they continue to do it? For a half century they have stuck to this back-breaking, heart-breaking task because of use and wont and custom. Will they keep it up forever? It does not seem likely. These submerged farmers cannot produce cotton under boll weevil conditions and keep soul and body together—or not at any prices that cotton has brought at any time during the last forty years.

And if they quit? Well, if they do, the merchants and bankers of the South will face bankruptcy and the cotton spinners of the country will be in sore straits.

And about these facts of gross cash incomes in money, per person in farmer households, this may be said—they are facts.

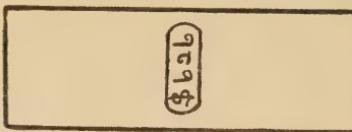
We do not know and probably never will know the exact cost of producing a pound of cotton on any farm or in any community of any state. The cost varies according to the season, the size of the farm, the industry,

Average Gross Cash Incomes Per Family.

329 Farms.

Baldwin + Williams
Townships.

Chatham County, N.C.
1921.



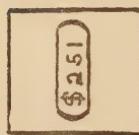
135 White
Owners.



41 Black
Owners.



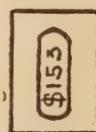
66 Black
Renters.



38 White
Renters.



36 Black
Croppers.



13 White
Croppers.

the technical skill and the managerial ability of the farmer; and reliable facts are difficult to assemble because book-keeping and cost accounting are rare in farm areas. The best we have been able to learn about the cost of producing cotton is barely better than a mathematical guess more or less approximate.

And we know almost as little about the net labor income of the cotton farmer. It is a problem of the same character and complexity as that of reckoning the unit cost of cotton production, and the usual results of farm income surveys in the cotton belt are little more than arithmetical approximations.

But we can know about the gross money incomes of farmers. That information is as simple as abc's. We know about the gross money incomes of 329 farmers in two Chatham county townships in 1921—about (1) the cash incomes sourced in farm activities and interests, and (2) the casual money received from all other sources.

And no matter what their net incomes were, their gross incomes in money were a beggar's pittance, ranging from eight cents a day per person in the household of white croppers to 34 cents per person in the household of white farm owners.

Why ask about the net money incomes of people with pitiful money rewards of this sort? We know without asking that surplus cash for comforts and luxuries, for teachers and preachers, for books and papers, for church causes and tax treasures is scarce—how scarce these farmers alone know; and this scarcity imperils every forward movement in the community and in the commonwealth alike.

Here is the explanation of the farmer's interest in taxes and tax propositions. His interest is simple and single—he is opposed as a class to anything that increases his taxes. And his opposition is not sourced in stupidity nor in miserly reluctance: it is sourced in a collapsed pocket book.

II

The Social Estate of White Farm Tenants

Having considered (1) the property possessions and (2) the gross money incomes of 329 farmers, owners and tenants, black and white, in the area surveyed, let us now turn our attention to the 51 white tenants alone, and ask who they are, how they live, their chances at farm ownership under present conditions by self-effort alone, the need for outside aid, the number who could be aided in this territory, the probable number of such tenants in the state-at-large, and the feasible forms of aid that the state might effectively offer.

1. *Who They Are.* These fifty-one white tenants fall into three classes, (1) twenty-five renters living on and cultivating family lands, (2) thirteen renters with no landowning ancestry—with one exception the sons of landless tenant farmers, and (3) thirteen croppers who are without neighborhood kinship in land tenures—pilgrims, strangers and sojourners in the land, with little or no workstock and farm implements of their own, and

a minimum worldly wealth in household goods and utensils or with an average of only \$426 per family, which is only \$17 more than that of the 66 negro renters alongside whom they struggle for existence.

(1) The twenty-five white renters living on family lands are distinctly a preferred class of tenant farmers—here as everywhere else in the South. They are the sons, sons-in-law, or nephews of their landlords. They rent on favorable terms, they share in small or large measure in the properties and products of tribal farming—in fruits, vegetables, poultry, butter and eggs, in milk animals, workstock and implements, in automobiles and buggies in trips to town on week days and to church on Sundays, and so on and on. What they need they borrow from the homefolks. They belong to the landed gentry. They enjoy the social estate of the land owners. They live and move on a level with the best in the neighborhood. They are apprenticeship farmers who look forward with more or less certainty to land-ownership by gift, inheritance, marriage, or purchase on easy terms. They know, none better, that farming is no maypole dance; but there are better days in store—not affluence and ease to be sure, but the prideful ownership of farms of their own and life on the highest levels in their home community and county. They are born and bred to farming and the way ahead is open. Many of them choose to be farmers as a way of life despite the call of the crowds in mill towns and city centers. Many or most of the five thousand additional white farm owners in North Carolina in the last census period rose into land-ownership out of this class.

Of the 135 white farm owners in the area covered by this survey fifty-four or two-fifths received their farms by gift, inheritance or marriage during the last twenty years, and of the 51 white tenants at present twenty-five or nearly exactly one-half are tenants on family lands, and are heading into ownership by birth or wedlock. Kith and kin relationships are now and have always been the South's main reliance for increases in the number of landowning farmers and for a stable agriculture based on ownership.

But mark this—these young people, bred to the purple of farm ownership, are the very farmers who can most easily move out of farm territories and adopt the manners and habits of city life; and under boll weevil conditions this is what they are doing in appalling numbers. So because the ownership of land in these devastated areas means farm profits and rent revenues reduced to zero, and farming as a business rendered unattractive or impossible. More and more they are turning away from farming as a livelihood in the South, and as a consequence farm tenancy in the cotton-tobacco belt moves steadily toward the peasant type of European countries. The South, in short, is developing a kind of farm tenancy that is unknown elsewhere in the United States. In the North and West farm tenancy is a capitalistic enterprise; in the south is a social estate.*

* It would be impossible in any cotton-belt county to find a fifth of the tenants operating with capital ranging from \$3,000 to \$9,000 each, as in Chester county, Penn., or one hundred tenants each operating with capital ranging from \$20,000 to \$60,000 and over, as in Iowa. See figures in Bizzell's *Tenancy in the United States*, pp. 137, 143. Tenancy in the South is not a matter of deliberate choice on part of farmers with operating capital; it is a matter of hard necessity on part of moneyless men.

(2) The thirteen white renters who are not living on family lands are all—or all but one—the sons of renters or croppers. They were not born to landownership. If ever they own farms of their own, they must depend on self-effort alone—on industry, thrift, sagacity, sobriety and integrity. Their lot in life is toil. With only two exceptions, their wives are hoe-hands in the fields, from eight to ten hours a day during periods ranging from thirty to two hundred days of the year according to family circumstances. One of these women is a mother fifty-one years old. The unbroken rule is to send the children, both boys and girls alike, into field work at seven or eight years of age—so because there is no hired labor to be had and no money with which to pay such labor.

The family property these self-help white renters have been able to accumulate ranges from \$243 to \$1405 in value; the average is \$424 or only \$153 less than the worldly possessions of the renters seated on family lands. Their ownership of workstock and farm tools is an evidence of industry and thrift. In varying degrees it indicates a look upward out of tenancy into ownership. A further indication of industry is afforded by the fact that their average annual cash income per family is nearly \$100 more than that of the white croppers—\$251 against \$153. They own no more personal property than the white croppers, but they work harder and look higher. As for social status, they are fairly on a level with the preferred class of white renters on family lands. White owners and tenants of both classes worship together in the churches, their children play together at school and vie with one another for applause at the school commencements, their families exchange visits freely, they fish and hunt together in the open seasons. There are no apparent class differences between white renters and white farm owners in this territory. Both types of renters—those living on family lands and those without kinship to their landlords—are fairly stable types, living as they do on the same farms or in the same neighborhoods year after year. The stability of the white renters is best indicated by the ownership of milk cows. Twenty-nine of the thirty-eight own forty-one cows; eight of these own two cows each and two own three cows each. Only nine renters own no cows and three of these renters have the use of cows belonging to their landlords. Tenants of migratory instincts and habits rarely ever own cows—they are a bother in moving. In this tenancy area milk and butter are abundant staples of family diet; which puts Chatham in sharp contrast with the all-cotton counties of the Tidewater and the Coastal Plains. These renters are people of stable citizenship, or so in the main. Good tenants are too hard to get and to keep, for the landlords to be over-exacting in rent contracts and business dealings. Many of these self-help tenants have been on the same farms year after year. The ratio of change from year to year is less than one-fifth, against one-half in the cotton belt of the State and the South.

(3) The thirteen white croppers are in a different category in many or most particulars. And mind you, they are a fourth of the white tenants in this territory. They lack industry in the area surveyed; as shown

by the fact that their average annual cash income per family is \$44 less than that of the black croppers, nearly \$100 less than that of white renters, and \$136 less than that of the black renters. They lack aspiration, as shown by the fact that they own little or no workstock and farm tools, without which they could not hope to rise out of tenancy into ownership. They lack the home-owning aspirations and virtues of the thirteen self-help farmers in the class next above them. Their standards of living are higher but their levels of life are lower than those of the black farmers alongside whom they live and work; inevitably so because their average cash income is less—22 percent less than that of the black croppers, 47 percent less than that of the black renters, and 74 percent less than that of the black owners. They suffer in personal and in family pride. They move from pillar to post from year to year. They are a migratory type of farmers. They are cursed with the restless foot of the Wandering Jew. They lack identity with the community in which they live. They lack abiding citizenship and a sense of proprietary interest in schools and churches and neighborhood enterprises. They lack a sense of responsibility for community morals, law and order. They live on an average cash income of eight cents a day per family member in the area surveyed and upon some such pauper wage the South over. They are unduly tempted into the business of making and vending illicit liquors. They furnish a disproportionate percent of the white cases on the criminal court dockets. They are satisfied with their landless lot in life. They are a contented not a bold peasantry, in Goldsmith's phrase, but they are not their country's pride. As a class they are a doubtful economic asset and a distinct social menace. Or so they are as a rule in Chatham, in every other county of the state—in this state and in every other state of the cotton and tobacco belt.

2. *The Homes They Live In.* From this point on we group both types of white renters together, because they live on almost exactly the same social level. The differences are trivial and not worth noting. From time to time we deal with the white croppers separately because they are a class occupying a distinctly lower level of existence.

The households of the thirty-eight white renters number 178 souls. The children number 101 and sixty of these are children of school ages. The dwellings they live in are usually of board and timber construction, a few are old log houses, the left-over remains of former days. Six of them let in the weather through the roofs or the floors and walls. Twenty have 203 window lights out and ten have shutters off. In more than half of these dwellings it is possible to study astronomy through the holes in the roof and geology through the cracks in the floor. There is a separate dwelling for each family, and the 38 dwellings are scattered throughout 104 square miles of territory or close to three square miles for every family. There is no lack of elbow-room for family life in this farm area.

On an average these dwellings are thirty years old; nearly half of them have faced the elements for a quarter century or more. Only four have

been built within the last four years. How can farm owners with a gross money income averaging \$629 a year build new tenant houses or keep the old houses in proper repair?

Nor is there any lack of elbow space within the tenant dwellings. There are 164 rooms and 147 beds for the 178 occupants. The bed rooms number 124 or more than three per household on an average. Of one-room shacks there are none, and of two-room shanties only four. Eleven dwellings have four rooms each, and fifteen contain from five to six rooms each. These last were the homes of farm owners in by-gone days, now abandoned to tenants. The crowding of humans as in city tenements is a thing unknown in the country regions of the South. Parlors are rare—there are only two in all the thirty-eight dwellings. There are no separate sitting rooms. Bed rooms and sitting rooms are one and the same, and kitchens are invariably used as dining rooms. Only seven of the dwellings are ceiled or plastered, only ten are painted or whitewashed, and only thirteen evidence care on part of the occupants.

But there are signs of family pride and aspirations here and there. One tenant has a washing machine, two have automobiles, two have refrigerators, three have telephones, four have organs, four have victrolas and three have other musical instruments, five have rugs on the floors, nine live in dwellings wholly screened and seven in dwellings partly screened, nine have grass plots about their houses, thirty-one have flower beds, and thirty-five have sewing machines. But in the main, comforts, luxuries and conveniences are sadly lacking in these households—how could they be provided on cash incomes averaging fourteen cents a day per family member?

3. *Health Conditions.* None of the thirty-eight families have running water in their dwellings, thirty-five have wells, all of them over twenty feet deep; ten of these are open and twenty-four are closed; twenty are under the kitchen or the porches or in the yard within thirty feet of the house. Three of the families must bring the daily water supply in oft repeated trips up-hill from springs.

Only eight families have out-door closets, and these are all used by both sexes. None of the out-houses are fly-proof or water-tight, all are open to the poultry and pigs, none are ever cleaned, and three of them are drained toward the water supply. The bushes and the barn lot buildings are the screens of family privacy for thirty homes. Soil pollution by body-waste is the rule here as elsewhere throughout the country regions of the United States.* Kitchen waste in all the dwellings is fed to the hogs in the nearby pens, and on six lots the pens are drained toward the water supply.

A doctor's office is on an average of eight miles away from the homes of these thirty-eight farm tenants. And so only seventeen families called in physicians during the year. Five others called on the doctor in his office. The total paid by twenty-two families to the doctors in fees and to

* Rural Sanitation—Public Health Bulletin No. 94, U. S. Public Health Service, Washington, D. C.

the druggists for prescriptions was \$1068 which was an average of \$48.64 per family. Thirty-five of the homes spent \$219 for patent medicines and nostrums of one sort or another, which is an average of \$6 per family. Nearly one-ninth of the total cash incomes of this group of tenants went for illnesses, to say nothing of funeral expenses when the illness ended in death. Seven homes had doctors' bills ranging from \$50 to \$400 each. In one home the worldly possessions amounted to \$218 and the doctors' bill to \$75; in another the doctors' bill was \$160 or a full third of all the tenant owned on earth; in another the doctors' bill amounted to \$400 and the tenant's worldly goods to only \$289. No wonder the doctor is called in as seldom as possible and always at the last moment—not because his charges are so large, but because the tenant's ability to pay is so little. And no wonder that all but three of the households rely for the most part on quack remedies and patent medicines. Small cash incomes in farm-owner homes and poverty in tenant homes is the reason why doctors cannot live in the country regions, and why they are fleeing out of the rural counties. If a single doctor had all the tenant practice of these two townships he would have had only \$1068 to live on in 1921, supposing he were able to collect every cent of it. Ill health and the cost of it in cash keeps many or most of these tenants poor—hopelessly poor. Solomon was right: verily the destruction of the poor is their poverty. Death is more endurable than sickness in many tenant homes. Said one sad-faced mother who had lost two children in infancy. "I reckon it was a God's mercy. I didn't have nothing fit ter feed 'em on and no chance ter take care uv 'em."

The children borne by the mothers in these households in the course of a life-time number 148. Forty-seven of these children are dead. Eighteen were born dead, eleven died during the first year, and six during the first five years. Twenty-seven of the mothers were delivered by doctors, five by white midwives, one by a negro midwife, and five were unattended in child-birth save by the panic-stricken members of the households. Only one-eighth of all the children were delivered by midwives—a most surprising discovery. Most people have an idea that midwives play a larger part in the country regions. Only four of the thirty-eight tenant mothers have ever received the literature of the State Department of Public Health, and these four are the daughters-in-law of home-owning farmers. Six households have had no medical examination of their children at school and no reports of their physical defects. Not one of all the 178 members of these tenant households has ever been vaccinated against smallpox or typhoid fever. Disease prevention and health promotion are little considered in farm tenant homes.

Two things stand out in this field study. First, the virility of the men, the fecundity of the women, and the amazing grip on life of our tenant populations. The signs of physical degeneracy are rare in the area surveyed. Our renters are a coming not a disappearing element of population in the South. All they need is a decent chance; and when we say this, we have in mind the renters, not the croppers, who represent the

bottom-most levels of life in our farm regions. And second, the prevalence of sickness of one sort or another—the result not of insufficient food, quantities considered, but of unvaried, ill-balanced diets, and untutored ways of cooking and serving meals. Disordered digestion and defective teeth are the common causes of chronic morbidity; soil pollution and fly-borne diseases are the major causes of mortality. Or so we came to conclude.

4. *Schools and School Influences.* For the white children of these two townships there are seven public schools. Six are one-teacher schools of elementary grade, open for only six months of the year, usually in the fall and winter months when the demand for work in the fields is least. One is a five-teacher school at Bynum, a little cotton mill village of some forty-odd dwellings. Here the children have a chance at two years of high-school subjects—their only chance at such schooling in these two townships. For more they must go into other townships or counties. All the elementary schools in the open country are housed in buildings that are old and weather-stained. None of them have been built within the last twenty years. They are taught for the most part by young girls in their teens or by young women born in Chatham or in the neighboring counties. All the teachers have had schooling in high school subjects, four have had some schooling in college subjects, but none are college graduates. The rule is a new teacher in each school every year, because the teacher is dissatisfied with the school conditions of the district or because the people of the district are dissatisfied with the teacher. Exceptions to this rule are few from year to year. The schools and country roads are so inadequate that the people are strongly minded to petition the legislature to annex their territory to Durham county where school and road funds are more abundant. As a result the Chatham school board offers to replace the six small country schools next year with three consolidated schools, two in Williams and one in Baldwin. The country people are strongly in favor of larger, better schools, but they are finding it difficult to agree upon the locations of the consolidated schools proposed.

The inadequate school advantages of this area have left their marks upon the fifty-one tenant households. One hundred and seventy-three of the occupants are more than ten years of age, and sixteen of them are unable to read or write, which is an illiteracy ratio of 9.2 percent, against a state average of 8.2 percent.

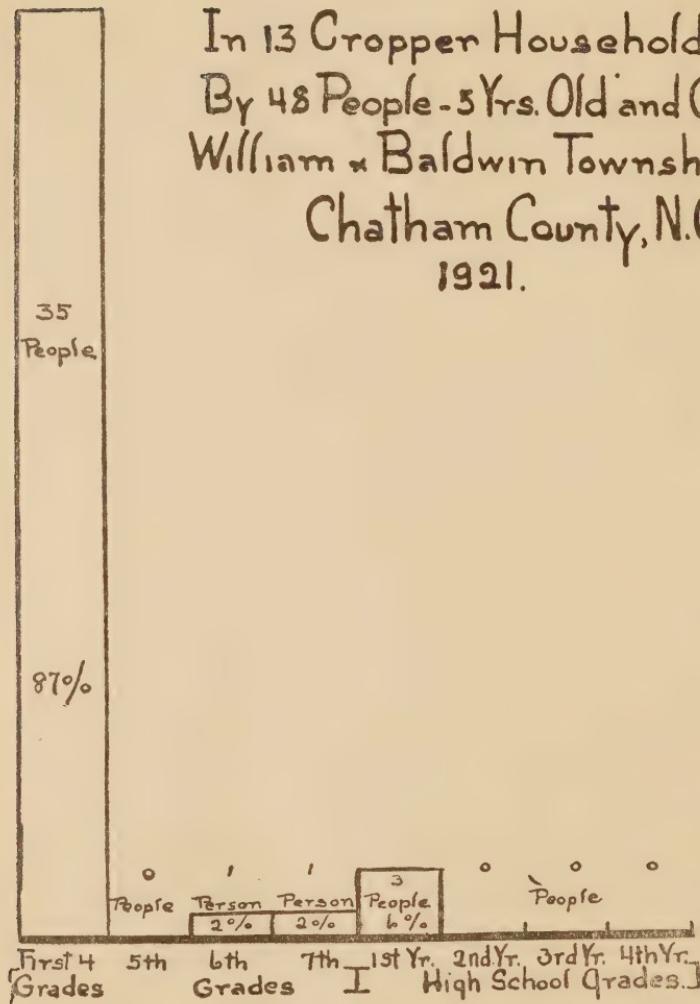
One or more illiterates were found in six families. Thirteen of the sixteen were found in three families. These are the families in which illiteracy reigns. In two families are seventeen people ten years of age and over, and ten of them are illiterate. The extreme case is one cropper family with six in the household; five are ten years old or over and three are illiterate. Nobody in this household belongs to the church, and nobody goes to Sunday school. It is the excessive number of illiterates in these three families that smudges the score of the two townships. But for these and one illiterate each in three other families it could be said that there is no

white illiteracy in Baldwin and Williams townships. There is none whatsoever in forty-five of the fifty-one tenant families.

The school levels of the thirty-eight renter families are significant of the culture of this tenancy area. There are 103 people in these households seven years old and over. Thirty-seven have reached only one or another of the first four grades; ten got only as far as the fifth grade; nine got only into the sixth grade; and twenty-eight reached the seventh grade. Only nineteen or around a fifth of them all have ever had any acquaintance with high school subjects. For nearly exactly half of the renter households, school culture may be said to stop on a fifth reader level. Eight people in these households have had only one year of high school instruction, four reached the second high school grade, five dropped out in the third year, and only two were graduated. There is no member of any tenant household in all this area who ever went to college or ever received a college diploma.

The record of the thirteen white cropper households is even more significant. There are forty people in these families seven years old and over, but only five have ever gone beyond the first four grades of school. One got as far as the sixth grade, one as far as the seventh grade, and three got into the first year of high school subjects. For nine-tenths of the cropper families life stops on a fourth reader level. The contrast between the school culture of renters and croppers appears at a glance in the charts that follow.

School Levels Reached.
 In 13 Cropper Households
 By 48 People - 5 Yrs. Old and Over
 William & Baldwin Townships.
 Chatham County, N.C.
 1921.



School Levels Reached

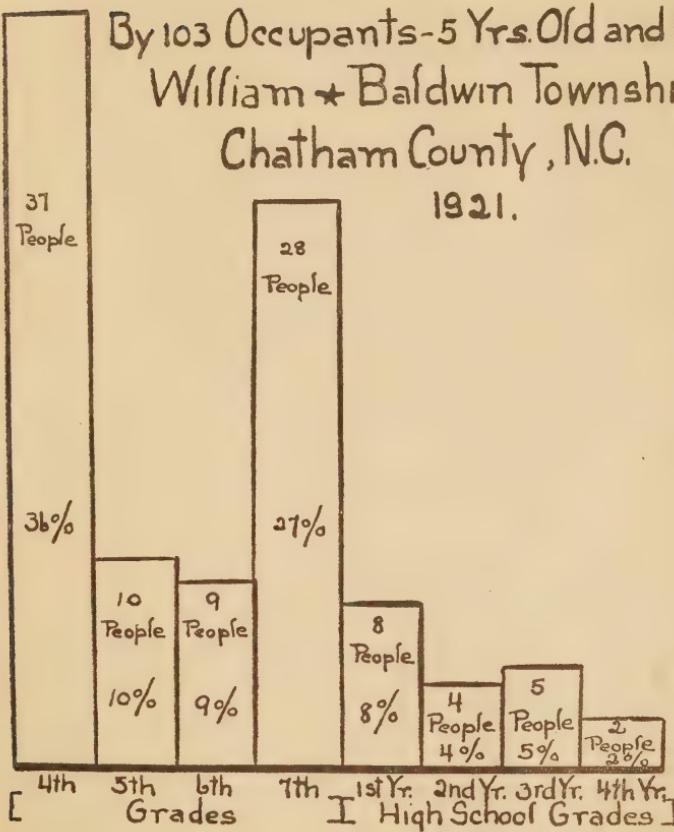
In 38 Renter Households

By 103 Occupants - 5 Yrs. Old and Over.

William & Baldwin Townships.

Chatham County, N.C.

1921.



The country regions furnish three-fourths of the college professors and five-sixths of all the preachers of America, says Ashenhurst; but in North Carolina they are born and bred in the homes of farm owners, not in the homes of farm tenants. There may be exceptions, but they could not be brought to light by the research questionnaires of Rev. J. M. Arnette, a Baptist minister applying for a doctorate degree from the University of North Carolina. His conclusion is that the farm tenant homes of this state give no preachers to the churches of his faith, or so few as to be negligible in the total count of Baptist clergymen. We definitely know

that farm tenancy raises the ratios of white illiteracy and lowers the ratios of white church membership with fatal certainty in the South. Does it also blow out the light in the souls of our white tenants? If so, farm tenancy ought to probe to the quick of the intelligence and Christian conscience of church authorities and church members, for the sixty-three thousand white tenant households of North Carolina contain nearly one-fifth of the entire white population of the state.

5. *What Farm Tenants Read.* The thirty-eight tenant households subscribe for newspapers and magazines, receive free public bulletins, and own books as follows:

- 12 families subscribe for a country weekly each.
- 12 families subscribe for a farm paper each.
- 9 families subscribe for popular magazines, 14 in number.
- 6 families subscribe for church papers, seven in number.
- 5 families subscribe for a daily paper each.
- 38 families have each a Bible and an almanac.
- 0 families subscribe for children's papers or magazines.
- 4 families receive the State Public Health Bulletin.
- 0 families receive any other bulletins—from any state department, or any state college.
- 13 families have all told 153 children's books including school books.
- 14 families have 38 religious books, mainly songbooks.
- 3 families have 43 novels.
- 34 families have 473 volumes of various other sorts, mail order catalogues, reports, old medical books, law books, etc., most of these in three families.
- 0 families have any books on agriculture or country life.
- 0 families borrow books from school or other public libraries.
- 2 families have no books but the Bible.

The bulk of the papers, magazines, books and bulletins are in the homes of thirteen tenants on family lands who have inherited the traditions of family culture in farm-owner homes. Seven self-help tenants and five croppers subscribe to newspapers and have a few books in their homes—one of these, a goodly number of books. Twenty-six or more than half of the fifty-one tenant homes are bare of books, papers, and magazines. The wonder is not that so few but that so many books, papers, and magazines reach these farm tenant homes. The 153 books for the children are the bright particular spot in these homes. One hundred and fifty-three children's books would not long keep alive the sixty youngsters of reading ages in thirty-eight homes, but we dare to say that they play a large part in making country life endurable.

The country weekly leads the list of newspapers, here as everywhere else in the state, and advertisers may like to note this fact—that is, if they want to reach the people who have a minimum of pin money to spend.

Church papers come fourth in the order of frequency, and the editors of church papers may like to note that fact. Farm tenants crave country

weeklies, farm papers, and popular magazines more than they crave the religious journals of North Carolina.

Aside from the Bible, the books in these homes are miscellaneous volumes, children's books, novels, and religious books, named in a descending order of numbers. No book on agriculture was found in any tenant home, and in one cropper home no Bible.

The state departments and the state institutions may like to note that aside from four homes receiving the State Health Bulletins, they are reaching none of these tenant homes with official literature. If they have an idea that their extension activities are covering North Carolina like the dew, they are mistaken. There is an immense work for them all to do in field services to the people of the state. The homes of the white renters are beyond their efforts at present in this area; and even more the homes of the white croppers. The chances are these facts are statewide, and that the 317,000 people in white farm tenant homes are receiving no benefit or almost none from their extension efforts.

6. *Churches and Church Influences.* Next to the home which is everywhere the strongest social group in country civilization, the country church stands out as the most important social institution—in this territory, in the state, and in the South in general.

Eight churches of three denominations serve the 1700 white inhabitants of Baldwin and Williams townships. Seven have preaching once-a-month and usually in rotation. All but two of the preachers serving these eight churches are non-residents, living in other communities or counties. Only one preacher in the active ministry and only one retired minister are living in this territory.

As in Orange, the country church buildings evidence pride and care. All but one were painted once-upon-a-time. The window lights are in, the blinds are on, the interiors are swept and dusted, the buildings are locked between preaching events, the grounds and graveyards are in order, and are kept so by the memorial day clean-up that features the country church year in mid-state Carolina, or such is the general appearance of all but one of the country churches. The dwellings of a country region in mid-state North Carolina may look dilapidated, but not the country church buildings as a rule.

Preaching in the different churches makes every Sunday of the month a social occasion for all the people, and everybody or almost everybody goes to church. It is the event of the week. The great event of the year is the revival or protracted meeting when crops are laid-by in the fall and the whole countryside turns out. Unhappily these church-recruiting occasions often conflict in dates. The church that offers the greatest excitement draws the largest crowds. The indifferent and the openly irreligious come out to the church at protracted meeting times. Even the bootleggers fringe the out-skirts of the crowds and not infrequently ply their trade within the curtilage of the churches.

The rest of the year the households go to the church of their own faith on one Sunday; the other Sundays of the month they mingle with the

congregations of other creeds, with a steadily decreasing sense of church differences. We'd all belong to one and the same church if it wasn't for the preachers, said one farmer with a twinkle in his eye. The families of farm owners, renters and croppers meet and mingle on a common level on Sundays; they freely exchange invitations to the basket dinners of the family groups on the church grounds on big occasions; and on the whole in this area the country churches are unifying rather than separating social influences.

Are these churches reaching and serving the tenants? This was the main inquiry of the church section of our survey schedule. The answer is, Yes, in the main—church attendance considered.

It is the rule in this corner of Chatham for every family to hitch-up or crank-up and go to church on Sundays—to the church of its own faith on one Sunday of the month and to other churches within reach on other Sundays. Preaching is the event of the week. It is the one chance for social intercourse, for talk about crops and candidates by the men and about babies and household ailments by the women. It is the rule of every renter family of both types—the kinsman and the self-help tenants almost without exception. The farm-owning families attend church no better than the renters, and there are no discoverable class differences here or elsewhere in this tenancy area.

But just as we expected, the thirteen white cropper families lag behind in church attendance. Four of these families or nearly a third of them all are habitually absent from church. No way to go, church too far away, no clothes, they say. In three families the fathers had the smell of corn whiskey on their breath when our surveyor talked with them, and the entire household were manifestly below the level of the neighborhood.

So much for church attendance. The Sunday school is another story. Of the fifty-one tenant families, thirteen go to church but not to Sunday school, four families more attend neither Sunday school nor church, and these four families are croppers. Thirty-four percent of the renter households and seventy-nine percent of the cropper households are not in Sunday school.

The Sunday school which ought to be the strongest phase of religious organization is the weakest. Here as elsewhere it fails to reach the humbler homes—the homes of the croppers in particular.

Tenant Church Membership. Turning from church attendance to church membership the tabulation is as follows:

HOUSEHOLDS	Occupants	Ten years old and over	Non Church members	Pct. Church members
25 Kinsman renters	178	83	13	86
13 Self-help renters	71	50	8	84
13 Croppers	72	40	24	40

It will be noted that church membership in white tenant families in this territory is in direct ratio to property ownership, stable residence, and community identity. Here is the reason why three-fifths of the cropper

households are outside the church, and four-fifths of them outside the Sunday schools. The highest ratios of church membership are in renter households, and the lowest in cropper households. The renter households are 22 and 24 points above the state average of church membership, and the cropper households are 22 points below it. And it must not be forgotten that one of every ten people in these white cropper households, ten years old and over, is illiterate, and that nearly nine times out of ten his education ends with the fourth school grade. Here as elsewhere in the South a high illiteracy ratio in white tenancy areas means a low church membership ratio, for two reasons: first, it is embarrassing not to be able to read the hymns, and to sing with the rest of the congregation; and second, illiterate white croppers have little or no money to put into the contribution boxes, and "where we kaint pay we don't go," as one renter expressed it. White farm tenancy in the South breeds poverty, poverty breeds illiteracy, and together these three social conditions are deadly menaces to the country church. Besides, they remove beyond the reach of the church the very people who most need its ministrations, or so as a rule.

White Renters and Croppers.
 Williams and Baldwin Townships.
 Chatham County, N.C.
 1921.



7. Social Occasions and Contacts. The three hundred and twenty-nine families of Baldwin and Williams townships—the owners and tenants of both races—are scattered throughout 104 square miles of territory. Whites and blacks are nearly equal in number, and their farms are small, averaging less than thirty cultivated acres each. They dwell in solitary farmsteads with wide spaces between, and farming is by nature a solitary business. The unit of economic production is the family, and the father is the over-lord of the group, in the ancient patriarchal fashion of family life. He may not have his legs under his own table, as the Danes say, but where he sits is the head of it, and nobody in the family is in doubt about it. Such is the type of rural family life in Chatham county, the State, and the South as a whole.

Within family groups in the country regions autoocracy is the rule; between family groups democracy is the unquestioned order. The farmer is the best in his own group and accounts himself equal to the best in any other farm group. So it is in the rural civilization of almost all the countries of the new world. In almost all old-world countries the farmers dwell together in farm villages, and the extremes of individualism are softened by the intimate social contacts and the common concerns of hamlet households.

As a result American farmers are bred to think privately and locally in terms of the family and the neighborhood. They do not easily think in terms of the community and the commonwealth. The private-local mind of the farmer in the South is the ultimate obstacle to country community life and coöperative farm enterprise; also it is the ultimate problem in county government and in commonwealth development.

What, then, are the influences that tend to mitigate the overweening, unadjusted individualism of farm life in the field of this survey? What are the occasions that bring families together—in particular the families of tenant households? And what contacts do they have with the outside world?

Our study discloses the social aloofness of the farm tenant—the great distances to town centers, until recently in Chatham the absence of improved public highways, the rarity of telephones and motor cars—there are only two of each in fifty-one tenant homes, the fourth and fifth grade levels and limits of school culture in a majority of the families, the small average number of household newspapers, magazines, and books. The epoch-making events of the big wide world break in tiny ripples on the far distant shores of farm tenant lives only after many days—here and everywhere else in the South.

Social contacts and social occasions in the tenant households of this territory consist mainly of the inter-family affairs and events of the local church and school neighborhoods. In the order of frequency they are (1) preaching days in the country churches and commencement occasions in the country schools, (2) mutual visits between the homes of owners and tenants of each race on the basis of democratic equality—assumptions of family superiority are almost unknown, (3) the neighborly exchange of

labor in pinches produced by seasonal stresses—plowing, harvesting, threshing, corn shucking seasons and the like, (4) dogs, guns, and hunting parties—in these fifty-one tenant households there are fifty guns and forty-six dogs, (5) picnics which are usually school events, (6) holiday occasions and neighborhood gatherings, mainly during the Christmas season—parties or sociables as they are called, (7) occasional neighborhood fairs, usually at the school buildings, (8) other events—barbecues, opossum suppers and so on. The most common entry in the schedule blanks is “visiting, talking, telling jokes, hunting, fishing, eating, watermelons.”

Practically everybody goes to church, every household hunts and fishes, and every family but one exchanges visits. The tenant families that have no part in the inter-family life of this territory are as follows: sixteen exchanged no labor during the year, eighteen attended no picnics, six took no part in holiday events, twenty-nine attended no sociables, and forty-two stayed away from the infrequent neighborhood fairs. No family attended a circus, and only one looked in at a film picture in the run of the year. Nowhere did we find a trace of dancing as a neighborhood event.

Children's plays around the home are primitive and in twenty-one homes they are altogether absent. Base, tag, dog-on-wood, hide-and-seek, eat, ball-over, stick-it-to-him, pitching horse-shoes, marbles, dolls, mud pies, riding sticks, red bugs, gully bugs, jack-in-the-bush, checkers, and rook are the home games of country children in this territory—dolls in only one tenant family, checkers in one, and rook in two. No cards were in evidence anywhere; but also Mother Goose is everywhere unknown. The home groups are too small for lively fun among the young people, and the one-teacher schools are too small to develop the values of team-play. Besides, the unconscious assumption is that children are born to work not to play. In listing for us the children's games in the various homes, one tenant housewife said with spirit, “I wants you to understand that we works hereabouts; we ain't no sportin neighborhood.” There is abundant seasonal leisure in farm tenant homes, but no leisure-time philosophy of life. Salvation for young people lies in work, and getting together for a good time is an evidence of mortal sin of some sort.

And such is the unconscious assumption of the country churches. In no instance did we find any evidence that they were concerned about wholesome recreation in the countryside. Not social affairs in this world but salvation in the next world is the core of religious consciousness in our country regions. Rural religion is not anointed with “the oil of gladness” that David prayed for. Fun and frolic are tolerated with qualms of conscience or viewed with vague suspicion as essentially evil. And so the country church resigns country recreation to the Devil and all his works.

Life in solitary farmsteads, a few to the square mile, in the vast open spaces of America, is in itself a denial of a primary social instinct—the craving for companionship, and the farm family group fails to satisfy this craving. As a result, lonesomeness alone plays a large part in the cityward drift of country populations; it plays the largest part in the

exodus of farm boys and girls in their teens. There has been a steady movement of country people out of Baldwin and Williams townships for thirty years; since 1890 the population of Baldwin had dwindled from 2068 to 1439, and Williams has dropped from 2760 inhabitants to 1517. More than a third of all the people of these two townships have moved out in a single generation. Soon or late, a steady decrease in population produces static or stagnant social areas. Such is the net result of economic and social disadvantages, of life and livelihood under uninspiring or dispiriting influences; and in the last analysis it is social disabilities that destroy values of every sort, economic, civic and religious alike—farm values and incomes, store business and profits, neighborhood life and enterprise, community morals, law and order, county government efficiency and church development. Such are the pressing issues of existence for farmers and storekeepers, teachers and preachers to consider in Baldwin and Williams townships. More and better roads, better market facilities, larger cash incomes, more efficient schools and churches, more books, newspapers and magazines, greater attention to sanitation and hygiene, a braver attitude toward community morals, law and order, and a more intimate acquaintance with county office affairs—such are the foundations of a fuller life in the territory surveyed in Chatham county.

8. *Civic Consciousness.* But there are comforting signs of intelligent appreciation of the way-out in Baldwin and Williams townships. The straw ballot taken in the fifty-one tenant households shows that only seven of the ninety-nine voters were opposed to consolidated schools, only three were opposed to coöperative marketing, road bonds, or 'book farming,' only two thought college education a waste of time, and only two considered themselves free, white, and twenty-one and privileged to do as they pleased without regard to morals, law and order. And mark this—of these ninety-nine voters, seventy-two are in the habit of voting regularly.

Nineteen voters expressed positive, definite opinions about community needs, and in the main they were intelligent opinions. The other eighty voters had no opinions—had never thought about such matters, they said. The unthinking and the unconcerned were the vast majority—but of such is the Kingdom of Democracy in free America.

III

Helping Tenants into Farm Ownership

The fifty-one white tenants are nearly a third of all the white farmers in this territory, and the 102 negro tenants are nearly three-fourths of all the negro farmers. Ideally it is desirable for these landless farmers to own the land they cultivate. Civilization is rooted and grounded in the home-owning, home-loving, home-defending instincts. Nobody doubts this fundamental fact. But what is ideally desirable is not always actually possible, human nature considered. All these landless men need help, but not all of them can be helped. Many of them with judicious assistance could rise into farm ownership and effective citizenship; others in large

numbers could not be settled down in stable property ownership of any sort by the angel Gabriel himself; as they now are, an outright gift of forty acres and a mule would avail them little more than the manna sent down from Heaven availed the Children of Israel.

Who Can Be Helped: (1) With rare exceptions, not many of the white croppers can be helped into farm ownership. They are a fourth of all the white tenants in Chatham, in the State, and in the South. In North Carolina they number 16,575 families, and in the main they are satisfied with their landless estate. The upward look into farm ownership is absent. As a rule they are handicapped by a lack of the homeownership virtues, namely (1) steady-gaited industry, (2) thrift which is the combined result of prudential foresight and hardy self-denial, (3) sagacity or the ability to think things through to wise conclusions, (4) sobriety or freedom from the use of intoxicating liquors, and (5) integrity—reliability, a sense of moral obligations, trustworthiness, and the like essential qualities of character. Lacking these home-owning virtues or the will to develop them, no man on any level of life is likely to acquire property in land or to hold it inviolate. The hopeful white croppers are few but these few ought to be helped. We estimate their number to be two in Baldwin and Williams townships and 800 in the state-at-large. The ratio of hopefulness is right around one-twentieth of all the white croppers of the state. But while little can be done for the adults in cropper households, surely much can be done for the swarms of bright-faced children, before they are hardened by the conditions in hopeless homes. What can be done for them is a problem for day teachers, Sunday-school teachers and preachers, home and farm demonstration agents, university and state college extension services. Here is the most insistent home mission problem in North Carolina and the South.

(2) The tenant group that offers the largest chance for effective outside aid is the group of self-help renters—so called because they have struggled into the ownership of workstock, farm tools and implements, household goods and utensils, by self-effort alone, without the advantage of kith and kin relationships to their landlords, and without the hope of acquiring farms by inheritance, gift or marriage. This group is one-fourth of all the white tenants in Baldwin and Williams townships, and the chances are that this ratio is approximately true in the state-at-large. Which means some 16,600 farm families. Many of these could safely be lifted into the ownership of farms by judicious outside aid; but not all, indeed not many more than one-ninth of them all, say 2,000 all told. I say one-ninth because numerous field studies at the State University, and in various centers of research the world over of late years, show that something like nine of every ten people live from hand to mouth, consume all they produce, spend all they make, and drop inevitably into debt in sudden emergencies.

(3) The kinsman tenants, the tenants whose landlords are fathers, uncles, fathers-in-law, and others closely related by blood or marriage ties, are one-half of all the white tenants in Baldwin and Williams townships,

and probably in the state-at-large. For them the way ahead into ownership is usually open, by inheritance, gift or marriage or by purchase on favorable terms. As a class they need not be considered in any policy of state-aid to farm ownership. What they need is mainly (1) the will to be home-owning farmers on the twenty-two million idle acres held by their kinspeople in North Carolina, and (2) farm prosperity sufficient to allow the accumulation of capital enough to equip their farms with more and better livestock, tools and machinery.

State-Aid to Land Ownership

To recapitulate: the white tenants in North Carolina who possibly might be helped into farm ownership are 800 croppers and 2,000 self-help renters, or 2,800 of the 32,000 white tenants of these two classes in the state. State-aid policies would be directly aimed at some 2,800 white tenant families and figured accordingly, to say nothing of some 1,400 worthy negro tenants. At the present average of current market prices for farm land in North Carolina, these 2,800 white tenants could be settled down on forty-acre farms of their own for \$1000 apiece, or \$2,800,000 all told.

Where are these millions to come from? From the state treasury as an outright gift? Not possibly so. There is no surplus there—nor ever likely to be—for landless farmers however worthy. And not desirably so, even if there were such treasury surpluses. State-aid to landless farmers, if considered at all, must be considered as a straight-out business proposition, and conducted from first to last as a solvent business enterprise not as a charity. It must not be a burden on the taxpayers of the state. It must not raise anybody's taxes by so much as a single cent, to pay either principal or interest. But while the state has no money to lend, it has credit in abundance, and this is what could be loaned to the worthy landless farmers of North Carolina as a state investment in character; and loaned not on the basis of state bonds of the kind we have heretofore issued but on the basis of debenture bonds issued by the state and protected by titles to the land bought for land settlement purposes and sold to the settlers. Not state bonds but debenture bonds issued by an authorized state agency and underwritten by the state is the business form of the proposition. What we are indicating is the California way, and there is no other way worth considering in North Carolina, in our opinion. The details in California appear in full in *Helping Men to Own Farms*, a small volume written by Dr. Elwood Mead of the University of California, executive secretary of the State Land Settlement Board, and the social engineer of the successful farm colonies established at Durham and Delhi. Our legislators and thoughtful students of essential commonwealth concerns in general in North Carolina are referred to this book. Twenty copies of it are on the shelves of the seminar library of the department of rural social-economics at Chapel Hill and will be loaned without charge upon request. We therefore limit our treatment of a state-aid policy to the few words of these brief paragraphs.

But before passing on to consider the Self-Help Agencies that already exist in North Carolina to serve capable ambitious tenants, we want to direct attention to the three essential values of the California Plan. First, it settles small farmers in farm communities and bases the marketing of farm products on community coöperation. Second, it costs the state nothing but capable faithful attention on part of its executive agency. Of the initial \$260,000 set aside in 1918 by the legislature \$118,000 has already been paid back, and the million dollars of debenture bonds authorized are not only fully covered by the land titles held, but the bonds are being paid off by the farmers, capital and interest, in amortized payments running through thirty-odd years. The plan of state-credit loans is so successful that the Board itself opposes any further aid by the state legislature. Third, the success of the plan has demonstrated that the private owners of large landed estates can use the business way of it to bring their idle, wilderness acres into cultivation with clear advantage to the settlers and with guaranteed profits to the land barons. The Settlement Board is therefore establishing no other colonies, but is devoting itself to the larger policy of schooling the owners of large estates in the business details of a complex plan, and to training social engineers of all sorts to act as efficient agents of private capital employed in establishing private colonies of home-owning farmers. In other words, what the state cannot do, as a large public enterprise, the private owners of large estates are now clamoring to do on their own initiative as a private business venture of demonstrated success. Showing the how of the thing is what California has done, and done at almost no expense to the state.

The initial \$260,000 authorized by the California legislature for administrative purposes would be a needlessly large sum in North Carolina. So because we do not have California's problem of leveling, ditching and irrigating desert wastes. Fifty thousand dollars would probably be sufficient to enable a Land Settlement Board in this state to effect an organization, to inventory the problem, to define the engineering difficulties, and to indicate the necessary engineering staff. And we may add that the difficulties are mainly technical engineering difficulties—business engineering, production and distribution engineering, and social engineering for farm community life, as well as civil engineering in the preparation of farm land for immediate productiveness. When the Board is ready for the business of this public enterprise, direct state appropriations cease, because the administration cost is transferred to the overhead account of a solvent business. Or so it was in California, and so it could be in North Carolina. Business ability and selfless public servants are not confined to California alone. We have these in abundance in North Carolina. Unhappily we do not have an Elwood Mead to call into the executive direction of Board policies and details. There ought to be ten thousand Elwood Meads, for upon men of his sort the success of such public enterprises mainly and finally depends.

State-aided farm colonies in North Carolina is a question that ought to be thoroughly debated before final decisive action is voted, and in-

telligent popular support must be aroused or the policy will fail if adopted. Moreover such a plan must be characterized by freedom from class-legislation. It must open the way into land ownership for both races alike. Negro tenants need such aid less than white tenants, because under prevailing conditions they are acquiring farms of their own faster than the whites are doing in every southern state. The explanation of this fact is exhibited in full in *The Human Way*, a little volume published by the Southern Sociological Society, and in *The University News Letter*, Vol. VIII, No. 37.

Perhaps the wisest approach to state-aided landownership would be through a state commission charged with threshing out the problem in North Carolina and reporting a feasible policy to the legislature two years hence.

Self-Helping Agencies and Qualities

But whether or not the state adopt California's policy of state-aid for landless farmers, there are existing agencies of help for sturdy, capable, ambitious tenants. Our country banks, for instance, more or less actively encourage the thrifty by offering four percent interest on bank account savings. The thrifty souls of the state have more than a hundred million dollars in these institutions. If all our banks were as busy in behalf of the farmers as the First National Bank of Tarboro, the total of bank account savings in North Carolina could be quickly doubled.

Next we have our coöperative farm credit unions. They number twenty-nine at present, or more than in all the rest of the United States put together. They could be greatly increased in number and effectiveness if only the state authorities directly charged with coöperative enterprise were properly bent upon realizing the intent of our coöperative credit union law—the best law on this subject in the whole United States. Our credit unions have largely failed of their purposes, because even more largely our state authorities have failed to see the need of such agencies in North Carolina and the potent part they might play in training farmers in the essentials of self-helping farm finance.

And next, our building and loan associations. They are more numerous, more active, and more prosperous in the towns and cities of North Carolina than in any other Southern state; but they need to be greatly increased in number, membership, and resources, and to extend their operations beyond town centers into the surrounding country regions, as in Ohio. A law already on our statute book authorizes this extension into farm areas, but our town needs are at present too great and our building and loan resources are too small to leave any surpluses to lend aspiring worthy farmers. If we can keep alive for a long term of years the B-and-L interest developed in North Carolina during the last twelve months, we can easily top the list of states in the ratio of dwellings owned by occupants. As it is, only one state stands ahead of us in this essential particular.

These are all self-help agencies, but they avail the thrifty alone. Many are called into the ownership of homes and farms, but only the thrifty are chosen.

Aside from these collateral social agencies, the way into landownership lies open to farmers endowed with sagacity—with what the farmers call hard horse-sense. Sagacity is the ability to think things through to safe conclusions. It is a personal quality that is fast developing into a social asset of farm community life and effort in North Carolina. Applied to farming it concerns (1) money crops produced on a bread-and-meat basis; (2) it concerns the distribution of farm wealth by the farmers themselves in coöperative marketing associations; (3) it concerns more and better meat and milk animals, a greater diversity of money products in commercial quantities, and a better balanced system of farming in the state at large; (4) it concerns farm industries—creameries, condenseries, and cheese factories, peanut cleaneries and peanut products, sweet potatoes prepared and stored for marketing throughout the twelve months, pork products—sausage, bacon, hams, shoulders, and the like—for sale by farm organizations in nearby or distant markets, as in Denmark, fruit packing and conserving plants, and so on and on. In every field of human effort—in farming, forestering, and mining alike—the direct producers of crude wealth are always at the bottom of the economic scale; it is the producers of finished products fit for final consumption, and the handlers of these products who get the bulk of the consumer's dollar.

It was sagacity applied to farming that devised Wisconsin's way out of bankruptcy in the eighteen eighties, and it must devise North Carolina's way out of farm poverty in the nineteen twenties. Otherwise the wealth that farmers produce will forever fail to stick to the palms that sweat it out. To the farmer that hath sagacity shall be added, and from him that hath it not, shall be taken away even that which he hath. This law of spiritual wealth works with the same fateful certainty in the field of economic enterprise, in town and country regions alike. Brain-sweatners have always lorded it over the back-sweatners. Education is the fundamental agency of progress, but the education that ripens into sagacity is at bottom the tenant's only chance, no matter what social or civic agencies lie at hand to help him. No matter what organic and statute laws may exist, they exist in vain for tenants who lack sagacity. With all their getting they must get what Solomon called wisdom and understanding, and it must be applied to farm production, farm distribution, farm wealth accumulation, and farm civilization in general.

The Place of Legislation

Nevertheless there is a proper place for legislative action in behalf of individual and social efforts at progress. Laws are like the retaining walls and the overhead arch in a tunnel through a sand bed—they support and preserve the results of progressive social enterprise. The tunnel would be impossible without the walls and the arch, and the walls and the arch would be useless without the tunnel. So it is in social progress of any

sort. For instance, coöperation as a form of business organization did not exist in law in any state of the Union twenty years ago. A corporation was a well defined legal entity and term, but a coöperation in any legal sense did not exist. And without legal definition, sanction, and supervision, a coöperative enterprise based (1) on the one-man-one-vote principle of control and (2) on dividends rated on business done through the organization as well as on stock owned, could not operate with either advantage or safety. Coöperating farmers were liable to indictment in the courts. They could be arrested as lawbreakers and tried as criminals are tried; they actually were so arrested and tried here and there in the United States. Coöperation law is just as necessary as corporation law.

And the same thing is true of credit law and credit institutions. Credit is ability and willingness to pay what is due exactly when it is due. It is the combined result of collateral and character. Every man—farmer, merchant, manufacturer, whatnot—creates his own credit; it is law that creates and regulates credit institutions. It is the business of borrowers to furnish collateral; it is the business of credit institutions to furnish accommodation. What is needed is (1) long-term credit accommodation for farm collateral offered for long-term loans at low rates of interest, and Congress has created land banks and other credit agencies to meet this particular need of the farmers. Congress alone is able to create such credit institutions on the large scale necessary. Federal Land Banks exist but they exist in vain for farmers who cannot offer proper collateral. They require farm land as collateral, and they serve land-owning farmers not landless tenants. Less than five percent of all the millions loaned by the federal land banks has gone to the landless tenants of the United States. What the best of tenants have is character and they have little else.

What worthy farm tenants need (2) is banks that capitalize character, and extend accommodation in personal-security loans in small amounts at low rates of interest running throughout the farm year. The coöperative credit union is the credit machinery that meets this need. It is sanctioned by law in some seventeen states but it has failed to develop into large proportions in country areas under state promotion, guidance and auditing supervision—even in North Carolina where its development shows the greatest progress in the Union. It is almost the sole hope of intelligent, industrious, and thrifty tenant farmers—of some 2,800 worthy white tenants and some 1,400 worthy negro tenants in North Carolina. Farm credit unions are a demonstrated success in every country of Europe; they are a failure in every state of America. What the states have failed to accomplish for landless men, the federal government must undertake, and it needs to be undertaken promptly on a large scale. Law cannot create collateral in goods and services, but it can create the machinery of credit accommodation, adjusted and administered to meet the peculiar needs of both tenants and landowning farmers. There is still much to be done in the field of farm credit institutions, if farm owners are to thrive, and if farm tenants are to have a decent chance to rise into ownership.

Other Obstacles to Ownership

In addition to the meager or the minus money returns to farming as a business in average years, there are certain obstacles in law and custom that paralyze the farmowner's interest in agriculture, and at the same time stifle the tenant's wish to own a farm. Farming don't pay, Ain't no money in it, If I own a farm I get taxed to death, The farmer's got no chance, I can make more money in a cotton mill, I can make more money doin a-most anything or nothing at all in town—these are the opinions we ran into in the farm tenant homes of Chatham county. They give expression to vaguely sensed facts. They are hard facts that exist in the country regions of Chatham county, North Carolina, and the Nation. And they are facts that must be reckoned with, or the day draws near when America will be asking, What shall we eat and wherewithal shall we be clothed? Already we are asking, What shall we do with the farm bloc in Congress and the agrarian revolt in general?

1. The fundamental obstacle to land ownership lies in the common law meaning of property. It is a meaning essentially negative. It is based on protection for the owner against the use of his own, without his free consent, by anybody else. It implies no positive obligation on part of the owner to make any use of it himself. It is hardly thinkable that the term could have any other meaning when applied to personal property, but when applied to property in land it has a dog-in-the-manger meaning that imperils the safety of civilization, or so it begins to appear. By what essential right human or divine may a man retain the possession of land that he will not or cannot put to productive uses? He has that right in common law, statute law, and organic law in every country of Christendom, but landless men are more and more beginning to question it. It is a question that involves more than law, it involves both ethics and religion, in the opinion of Isaiah of old, who pronounced a woe on Israel for joining house unto house and lot unto lot.

There are one million three hundred eighty thousand landless souls in North Carolina. More and more they are wondering about the one hundred thousand vacant town lots and the twenty-two million idle acres of farm land they look upon everywhere they turn in their home state—town lots and farm acres held out of productive use for speculative rises in value—held at prices that a full half of our people cannot afford to pay. What they see is land, land, everywhere and not a rood that the average wage-earner or farm-tenant can buy.

So it is in every state of the Union, with the result that the more populous and prosperous an area becomes the fewer are the people who own the houses they live in or the land they cultivate. It is Christendom's cruelest paradox. And no wonder men are beginning to question the common law meaning of property in land.

Estate or inheritance taxes, transfer taxes on increased sale values, progressive land taxes and the like are social ways of calling into question the rights of private property in land—in Belgium and Denmark, in

Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. Soon or late we shall have to resort to such remedies in America in behalf of the steadily increasing multitude of landless men. Students interested in this question are referred to Howe's *Privilege and Democracy in America*, Ghent's *Benevolent Feudalism*, Yetta Scheftel's *The Taxation of Land Values*, Rowntree's *Land and Labor in Belgium*, and Lusk's *Social Welfare in New Zealand*. The list is long, and these are just a few of the books that are best worth thumbing thoughtfully.

2. The second obstacle to land ownership lies in the heavy penalties laid on productive home and farm owners by the prevailing tax system of America. They are penalties so heavy that taxes, interest, repairs and insurance combined force the average man to rent rather than to own a farm or a home of his own. It is a tax system that imposes light or relatively light burdens on unimproved town lots and farm lands, and heavy burdens on lots and farms put to productive uses by enterprising owners. It is a system that rewards the inactive owner of idle lots and lands and punishes the wage-earner who buys a home or the tenant who buys a farm. The minute he ceases to be a tenant and becomes a home or a land owner, the taxgatherer darkens his door. For instance, the renters and croppers in the farm regions of North Carolina pay no taxes of any sort whatsoever, to the county, the state, or the federal government. Or so as a rule, because they own no land, and no personal property beyond the exemption of \$300 per household. They no longer pay poll taxes as a condition of voting. They pay no state income tax because they have no income beyond the exemption of \$2000 per family head and no federal taxes because they have no incomes beyond the exemption of \$2,000 per family head. In the area surveyed only eleven of the fifty-one tenant farmers are on the township tax lists. Forty of them are as tax-free as the birds of the air. But the minute any one of these forty buys a farm he pays county taxes on the full value of his purchase or so much of it as the assessor wills, no matter how little the new owner may have paid on his little farm, or how much he may still owe. He improves his property and increases its value, whereupon the assessor increases its tax value and calls for more taxes. The more industrious he is the heavier his tax burden becomes. So it is everywhere under the uniform *ad valorem* tax system—the general property tax system of this and other states, a system that has been abolished for state support in North Carolina, but that still remains the basis of county and municipal taxation. One may well doubt the essential righteousness of a tax system that rewards inactivity and punishes industry, thrift, and enterprise.

As a result the wage earners in our cities and the farm tenants in our country regions tell you that it is cheaper to rent than to own homes and farms. And it is true almost everywhere in America. But what a pity it is! And how direful the menace to home life and responsible citizenship—to the foundations of national sanity, security, and stability!

Constructive Suggestions

In behalf of aspiring, capable, worthy tenants in the town and country regions of North Carolina, we offer the following recommendations—not so much for immediate adoption as for popular discussion aimed at changes in the tax laws of the state as rapidly as practical wisdom may dictate. The people of North Carolina cannot erect a stable commonwealth on the landless estate of men, and the sooner we face this fundamental truth the better.

For lack of space we are stating without discussing these recommendations.

First, we recommend constitutional changes that will permit the classification of property values and the tax rates thereon; which means the definite abandonment for all purposes of the ancient general property tax. For an excellent discussion of the general property tax see McPherson's chapter in the 1908 volume of the International Tax Association.

Second, the separate listing of real estate and the improvements thereon in both town and country areas; the rates on improvements to be made low enough to encourage and reward industry and enterprise.

Third, definitely low tax rates on homes occupied by the owners and on farms operated by the landlords thereof; definitely higher tax rates on unused or unimproved town lots and farm lands; and still higher rates on such lots and farm lands when owned by residents of other states and countries. Which means, progressive land taxes—beginning with low rates on small properties occupied or used for productive purposes by the owners thereof, followed by rates gradually increasing according to acreage or value, with higher rates laid on unused, unimproved town lots and farm lands, and with the highest rates laid on such unused property when held by alien landlords.

The progressive land tax has been in force in New Zealand for thirty years. It took a score of years to put it on the law books of that country, and it will take a century or so to make it effective in bringing idle town lots and farm acres into productive use; so difficult is it to choke out of men the purely speculative interest in land ownership.

Such a law will be slow to get on the tax books of any state or country of the western world, and it will be slower still in accomplishing its purpose—namely, to give landless men a chance to own homes to live in and farms to cultivate. But we might as well begin to discuss it now in North Carolina.

Fourth, the taxing of the equities and nothing but the equities of home and farm owners, when the properties are occupied or operated by the owners themselves. As it is now, the owners of five-to-twenty-year mortgages amounting to \$3000 or less are exempt from taxation in North Carolina, provided these mortgages cover money loaned to buy homes and call for 5 percent interest or less. If we can exempt the owners of such mortgages, surely we can exempt the owners of such homes from tax on the property covered by these mortgages.

The manifest purpose of these constructive suggestions is to encourage the increase of owned homes, farms, and productive businesses of every type, (1) by minimizing the tax burdens of small homeowners and small farmers and giving them a decent chance to hold their homes and farms, (2) by laying a penalty on the owners of idle lots and farms, (3) by encouraging enterprise with lower rates on real estate improvements and investments, and (4) by penalizing acquisitive capital of the miserly type and rewarding productive capital invested in active enterprises in North Carolina.

Fifth, a State Land Settlement Board, charged (1) with investigating the California plan of establishing farm colonies, and (2) reporting a feasible plan of state-aid to capable farm tenants in North Carolina. With 100,000 vacant city lots, twenty-two million acres of idle farm land, and one million three hundred and eighty thousand landless, homeless people, town and country, it is high time we were considering proposed remedies of any sort whatsoever.

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